

FUNDED BY THE UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

# Independent Midterm Evaluation of **OPTIONS: Combating Child Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Through Education**

World Education

Cooperative Agreement Number: E-9-K-3-006 I



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**Independent Midterm Evaluation  
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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

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CNSP	Children in Need of Special Protection
CLC	Community Learning Centers
CSE	Commercial Sexual Exploitation
CSNACL	Civil Society Network Against Child Labor
CSWs	Commercial Sex Workers
CWCC	Cambodian Women's Crisis Center
DoSAVY	Department of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation
DT	Damnok Toek
EFA	Education For All
EI	Education Initiative
ESSP	Education Sector Support Program
GEWG	Girls' Education Working Group
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization of Migration
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
KAPE	Kampuchean Action for Primary Education
LWG	Local Working Groups
MBF	My Better Future
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
MoSAVY	Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation
MSI	Management Sciences International
MWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PK	Ponleur Kumar
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan
PMT	Program Management Team
STS	Student Tracking System
TAF	The Asia Foundation
TBP	Time Bound Programme
TOR	Terms of Reference

UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNICEF-CPS	UNICEF Child Protection Section
USDOL	U.S. Department of Labor
WE	World Education
WFCL	Worst Forms of Child Labor
WFP	World Food Programme



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Background

### *Context*

OPTIONS: Combating Child Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Through Education was funded as part of the U.S. Department of Labor's (USDOL) Education Initiatives (EI) Program to begin in August 2003. The project partners are challenged by the pervasive poverty, professional capacity, and societal ills stemming from decades of internal conflict and repression. The seriousness of the child trafficking problem is not disputed.

### *Evaluation Objectives*

The objectives of the midterm evaluation, conducted more than two years after project initiation, were to assess the ongoing progress and performance of the project based on its objectives and outputs; assess the achievements and impacts of the project to date; assess progress on children's working and educational status; provide recommendations for the second half of the project; and identify lessons learned and good practices for future USDOL projects. The evaluation was guided by Terms of Reference (TOR) supplied to the evaluation team.

### *Methodology*

The evaluation was conducted in three phases: desk review of project documents and technical progress reports; the field visit by a two-person evaluation team to meet directly with stakeholders, partners, beneficiaries, and observers; and follow-up conversations and review of additional evaluator. Two-day site visits each were conducted to project sites in Prey Veng and Kampong Cham provinces. A stakeholder meeting was conducted with representatives of key local NGO and local-level government partners as part of the data collection process.

### *Project Overview*

The OPTIONS Program consists of four core partners—World Education (WE) as the lead, CARE International, The Asia Foundation, and Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE). From the outset, they had established working relationships with various ministries and the international donor community focused on anti-trafficking and child labor initiatives. An overall the project target is to have 13,500 children who either are or are at risk of being exploited and trafficked in the provinces of Banteay Meanchay, Kampong Cham and Prey Veng (12 districts in total) enrolled in education programs. Additionally the project provides information about available support services through an outreach effort to child-migrants who are identified as at-risk in Phnom Penh.

## **Evaluation Findings**

### ***Program and Project Design***

The project design supports the Cambodian Government's educational goal of Education for All by 2015 and other national and international initiatives, such as the Millennium Development Goals. The project planning takes into account all of the EI goals, as well. At the start of the project, quantifiable objectives were targeted and indicators defined. For the most part, the project has met their targets on education outcomes, and where they have not, they have reflected on the reasons and made plans for improvement. The project has surpassed its target for enrolling at-risk children in education programs, having served 14,552 to date. Absence of baseline data, however, has impeded the measurement of the impact on reducing trafficking and exploitation. The project staff have also experienced problems in the use of the Student Tracking System (STS) to analyze and report data by cohort.

### ***Implementation***

OPTIONS has customized its delivery of programs, services, and awareness campaigns in the three provinces in which it operates. Each partner (WE, KAPE, and CARE) is responsible for a particular province but cross-fertilization of best practices and innovative ideas is encouraged. The project timeline seems realistic. The project has refined its definition of at-risk children so that the same basic criteria are used in each locale. The project also uses a referral system from the local social affairs offices. The Scholarship Program (consisting of supplies for educational purposes not cash) is directed at the most vulnerable primary school children (and in some areas, lower secondary) in all three provinces. Other initiatives include life skills and curriculum enhancement and nonformal education programs. A wide variety of community awareness activities are integrated into the educational activities; often students are used help disseminate the messages. A great deal of effort has also been expended to build capacity at the local level, although performance still remains uneven from one community to another. The Asia Foundation (TAF) had had lead responsibility for influencing policy (Output 4), including carrying out national policy workshops, policy dialogues, and strategic use of the media. At the time of the evaluator's visit, leadership and funding from TAF were said not to have met expectations.

### ***Partnership and Coordination***

The donor community is very large and active in Cambodia. OPTIONS project has become a well respected contributor to a number of initiatives centered on education and trafficking issues. The most recent effort, the Civil Society Network Against Child Labor, involves OPTIONS in the national dialogue about child labor with the International Labor Organization-International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO-IPEC) and others. They have also established strong ties with the Ministries of Education, Social Affairs, and Women's Affairs—especially at the commune, district, and provincial levels.

## **Project Management**

The Project Management Team and Technical Advisors that guide project are perceived by other staff and observers and collaborators as competent and dedicated. They are experienced in working in the education arena in Cambodia. Ingrid Martonova, Project Director from the start of the project, provides strong leadership. Monthly meeting help keep this complex project on track. There has been considerable staff turnover. Gaps in the staffing in Banteay Meanchay appear to have affected some service delivery. Project managers in the provinces request additional training and are concerned about the workload.

## **Sustainability and Impact**

Besides the obvious impact to the many thousands of children served, the project believes that its enduring contributions will be in the formulation of NFE programs, the life skills curriculum in primary school and out-of-school, and improvements in school quality through capacity building at the local level. The project's relationship with the Ministry of Education will assist in sustaining these education enhancements. Those activities, such as the Scholarship Program, that require considerable funding may not be picked up by the Royal Government of Cambodia.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The OPTIONS Project is well designed and has experienced many accomplishments in its almost three years of implementation. Project is a very complex undertaking, providing a myriad of educational supports to impoverished rural communities. Advocacy and efforts to influence policymaking have taken place most successfully at the local and provincial level, but the project has gotten more involved in national discussions more recently.

Despite all its positive results, the project has gaps (activities that have not been fully developed) and challenges (problematic areas related to contextual issues, implementation issues, and sustainability) that need to be addressed. The recommendations summarized below are thus suggested to further improve implementation and buttress the impact and sustainability of the project.

- Provide more attention to the needs of children rescued and reintegrated from trafficking to fully address Cambodian needs and the goals of the EI Program.
- Expand pilot efforts undertaken with children working in the brick factory sector as part of efforts to tailor programs and supports to hard-to-reach working children.
- Look to other countries for models on reaching working children.
- Focus more attention on implementation, capacity building, and obtaining results in Banteay Meanchay province in concert with CARE.
- Revisit the peer support initiative to monitor performance and attendance in Kampong Cham province, as participants have expressed difficulties and need more training.

- Carefully monitor harmful practices in local school management, such as the collection of unofficial fees.
- Produce the “Good Practice” Guide as soon as possible so that the important learnings from this project can be disseminated in a timely manner.
- Secure greater involvement and activity in advocacy with the core partner, The Asia Foundation.
- Discuss common areas of interest and support with UNICEF to improve coordination.
- Make better use of existing data and launch some small scale studies to better document the influence of OPTIONS-designed education activities on the working experiences and futures of participating children.
- Make a concerted effort to get the Student Tracking System to be a functional tool for the project or develop a more satisfactory mechanism.
- Begin planning with staff for the transition of programs and activities to post-grant status.
- Initiate discussions with government entities in education and social services about how effective programs and policies can be sustained.
- Focus on the capacity building that needs to take place with local government partners so that awareness and education campaigns continue and reforms endure.
- Review the workload of staff in terms of new activities and responsibilities assigned.
- Continue to advocate for performance and accountability on the part of Cambodian Ministry of Education to avoid the negative consequences of such things as delay in textbooks or scholarship funding.

# I BACKGROUND

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## 1.1 CONTEXT

By many measures Cambodia is a very impoverished country—GNP per capita, household income, literacy levels, infant mortality, and education levels. Many experts also call attention to the significant disparity in living conditions and services between urban and rural areas. Although there has been a great deal of attention and resources devoted to Cambodia by donor countries, international organizations, and NGOs beginning in the 1990s, most observers still point to several persistent problems in supporting significant educational and social change: the low level of capacity of government officials (from the villages to the national level) and the high level of corruption.

It is in this setting that World Education, Inc. responded to the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) solicitation for a cooperative agreement application to “improve access to quality education programs as a means to combat child labor” in Cambodia. (*Federal Register*, Vol. 68, No. 92, May 13, 2003). World Education (WE) had already been operating a pilot program in Prey Veng for UNICEF, and so was familiar with educational conditions and cultural issues, effective organizations they could partner with, and government ministries and their officials.

In addition to the challenges that social indicators depict in quantifiable terms and the other commonly identified constraints to development programs in this country, the Project Director also discussed post-conflict societal ills that are part of the context of an educational initiative to address child trafficking and child labor issues. The massive killings associated with the political regime of the Khmer Rouge particularly affected the intellectuals and the national educational fabric and also undermined family structure. Social capital, supportive family relationships, and community activism are still being developed.

The seriousness of the child labor and trafficking issues has been documented by a number of organizations. The Socio-Economic Survey of Cambodia determined in 1999 that, using a restricted definition of the working child, about one in every six children aged 5 to 17 years old was working. In the young age groups more boys than girls were working, but for ages 15 to 17, more girls were involved in work. The survey found that most of the working children (87%) were in the rural areas. In addition, only 45% of working children were attending school, and this proportion was lower for girls than boys. In the National Institute of Statistics’ publication, *Cambodia Child Labour Survey, 2001*, sponsored by the International Labor Organization, International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO-IPEC),<sup>1</sup> they assert “...exploitive forms of child labour have emerged in recent years. We need to study the worst forms of child labour that have to be combated. This has also added to the urgency of generating comprehensive child labor statistics.” (p. 7) WE, in the *OPTIONS: Combating Child Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Through Education Project Document*, discusses that there is no reliable, comprehensive data on trafficked people. They do describe Cambodia as a country of

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<sup>1</sup> A more recent report on the child labor situation in Cambodia has been prepared under the auspices of the “Understanding Children’s Work” program, but was not available online at the time of this report.

origin, transit, and destination for domestic and international trafficking networks. They cite various surveys that found that 30% of commercial sex workers (CSWs) in Cambodia are under 18 years of age, and that the majority of them have less than three years of basic schooling and little or no vocational training.

## **1.2 EVALUATION OBJECTIVES**

The midterm evaluation was designed mainly to serve as a learning tool for the Project Management Team. It reviewed and assessed the progress of the project outputs and activities toward reaching targets and objectives. The evaluation was guided by Terms of Reference (TOR) drafted by USDOL and revised through consultations with the evaluator and the grantee. The TOR document may be found in Annex A. Specifically, the evaluation aims to—

1. Assess the ongoing progress and performance of the project in relation to its stated objectives and delivery of outputs;
2. Assess the achievements, outcomes and/or impacts of the project to date;
3. Assess progress of children's working and educational status (i.e., withdrawal from the worst forms of child labor; enrollment; retention; completion of educational programs);
4. Provide specific recommendations based on findings that can be implemented for the second half of the project; and
5. Identify lessons learned and good practices to inform future USDOL projects.

## **1.3 METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION**

The evaluation was divided into three parts: (1) the desk review of project documents and technical progress reports; (2) the field visit to meet directly with stakeholders, partners, beneficiaries, and observers; and (3) follow-up conversations and review of additional documents by another evaluator to produce a report that fully responds to the TOR.

The two-week field work included individual and focus interviews, site visits, direct observations, and a one-day workshop. It was an opportunity to validate the achievements of the project as indicated in the progress reports and to collect further information, mainly through qualitative means, about the project strategies and activities including lessons, good practices and challenges. The evaluation team visited two of the three project sites, namely, Prey Veng and Kampong Cham Provinces. Two days were allocated for the visit of each province, which was undertaken on February 21–25, 2006. Because of time constraints, the project activities in Banteay Meanchay Province were not included in the site visit.

Individual interviews were conducted with members of the Program Management Team (PMT), representatives of nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners, and representatives of cooperating United Nations (UN) agencies. Policymakers at the central level of key and partner-government agencies were also interviewed individually. Focus group interviews were

undertaken with project beneficiaries: children, parents, teachers and local working groups. The interviews lasted from 1.0 to 1.5 hours. A total of 62 children, 37 parents, and 28 working group members participated. Views, opinions and suggestions are solicited about the project implementation strategies, benefits and impact, and sustainability. As the information is mostly qualitative, respondents are asked to compare trends and changes over periods of relevant education and social issues to assess whether the project has made an impact and brought positive changes. Direct observations were also conducted to assess the quality of learner-teacher interaction in formal and nonformal education activities of the project. A partial list of interview subjects and sites visited may be found in Annex B.

Representatives of key local NGO and local-level (province and district) government partners participated in the one-day stakeholder workshop. The objective was to gather more information, views and feedback about the collaboration between government partners and OPTIONS for supporting project activities at the different levels. Sustainability measures and issues were also discussed. The workshop used the participatory discussion approach, whereby participants were divided into small groups and were asked to discuss a series of questions about their experiences and views about the implementation and potential impact of the project. Outputs were shared in a plenary and a synthesis was presented at the end of the workshop. The program agenda and synthesis of the workshop outputs are presented in Annexes C and D.

## **1.4 PROJECT OVERVIEW**

OPTIONS: Combating Child Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation through Education is a four-year project in Cambodia and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) and other donors. The OPTIONS Program is about just that—offering options to vulnerable children, their families, and their communities. It works with community networks to identify children who are at risk and support them through formal and nonformal education interventions appropriate to each child's situation. It aims to reduce the number of children, especially girls, who fall victim to trafficking and sexual exploitation, ensure that children are protected from or are not at risk of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), and that they are educated in programs relevant to their needs.

The program is built on the philosophy that children and their families need the improved knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will guide them in varying circumstances (even difficult ones of poverty and natural disasters). It focuses on providing self-confidence and self-efficacy so that children can make better informed decisions. The varied projects and curriculum are designed to help children develop sustainable and transferable skills and to enhance their ability to learn and to solve problems. These educational opportunities are set forth to help children (primarily girls) to resist the pressures of child labor and trafficking.

The OPTIONS Program consists of four core partners—World Education (WE) as the lead, CARE International, The Asia Foundation, and Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE). From the outset, they had established working relationships with various ministries and the international donor community focused on anti-trafficking and child labor initiatives.

OPTIONS' varied interventions and activities support the four goals of USDOL's Child Labor Education Initiative (EI) as follows:

1. Raise awareness of the importance of education for all children and mobilize a wide array of actors to improve and expand education infrastructures;
2. Strengthen formal and transitional education systems that encourage working children and those at risk of working to attend school;
3. Strengthen national institutions and policies on education and child labor; and
4. Ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

In their Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP), the project has set forth a number of indicators to measure their immediate objective to educate vulnerable and exploited children in programs appropriate to their needs. They have also developed five major outputs (and indicators of progress) relate directly to USDOL's programmatic objectives. Their performance and the indicators themselves will be discussed in the Findings chapter. Overall the project target is to have 13,500 children who are or are at risk of being exploited and trafficked in the provinces of Banteay Meanchay, Kampong Cham and Prey Veng (12 districts in total) enrolled in education programs. A map locating the three targeted provinces is in Annex E. They also carry out an outreach component to provide information about support services provided through Mith Samlanh to child-migrants who are identified as at-risk in Phnom Penh.



## **II FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION**

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This chapter presents evaluation findings on five topics: (1) Program and Project Design, (2) Implementation, (3) Partnership and Coordination, (4) Management Issues, and (5) Impacts and Sustainability. Program and Project Design examines the strategies used by the project, the target populations, the network that OPTIONS draws on to carry out project activities, and the level of participation of local community and target groups in the project. Implementation describes project activities, the effects of external factors, the greatest successes and challenges of the project, and suggestions for future programs or activities. Management Issues examines the successes and challenges OPTIONS faced in managing the project and its network of partners, including financial reporting. Partnership and Coordination describes the working collaboration with NGO partners and stakeholders. Impacts and Sustainability presents the effects of the project for direct and indirect beneficiaries and explores the likelihood that these impacts will continue to accrue beyond the grant period. The chapter concludes with salient lessons learned and best practices to come out of the project.

### **2.1 PROGRAM AND PROJECT DESIGN**

World Education and its partners in the three targeted provinces are delivering an ambitious program with many interventions through the OPTIONS project. They (and their partners) have a strong history in education and they are developing some level of expertise in child welfare and child labor issues, with a focus on rural areas. Their focus is primarily on prevention and not withdrawal from the worst forms of child labor (WFCL).

#### **2.1.1 Project Design and Royal Government of Cambodia's Programs**

The Cambodian Government has in place policy and planning documents that highlight its commitment to provide targeted and appropriate formal and nonformal educational opportunities to at-risk children and child victims of trafficking and exploitation. The project is aligned with the government programs to provide access to relevant and quality education to disadvantaged groups, especially girls, who are at risk of dropping out from school and may become victims of exploitation. The scholarship and the life skills enhancement programs support the priority action areas of the Education Sector Support Program (ESSP), the Cambodian Government's main planning document consolidating priority education programs and focusing on the long-term goal of Education For All (EFA) by 2015.<sup>2</sup> Attention to gender issues related to education—improving girls' access to education and efforts to reduce female illiteracy—are within the EFA and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of Cambodia. Overall, the project design is consistent with the analysis of the education and social issues affecting disadvantaged and vulnerable children of Cambodia, particularly girls. It confirms the relevance of the project.

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<sup>2</sup> Details of the Plan may be found on the website of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/en/education/efa/index.htm>

## 2.1.2 Project Design and the EI Goals

The project strategies linked to the stated project outputs in the logframe hierarchy are effectively supporting the goals of the USDOL Child Labor Education Initiative (EI).

The following table demonstrates the direct link between the outputs that WE has developed in the application and planning process and operationalized through specific indicators and the program's goals.

**Table 1: Comparison of EI Goals and WE Outputs**

<b>EI Goals</b>	<b>WE Outputs</b>
1. Raise awareness of the importance of education for all children	Output 2: Increased awareness of trafficking and child CSE and role of education in prevention
2. Strengthen formal and nonformal education to encourage at-risk and exploited children to attend school	Output 1: Increased access to formal and NFE programs; improved quality of learning for vulnerable and exploited children
3. Strengthen local and national education, social, and governance structures to promote policies related to education and child labor	Output 3: Increased effectiveness of OPTIONS implementing partners (such as Working Groups and Scholarship Management Committees) Output 4: Government policies and practices informed/influenced by the work of program partners
4. Ensure sustainability of these efforts	All outputs take into account sustainability
5. Effective management and accountability promoted by USDOL	Output 5: Information generated by M&E system used by OPTIONS team

Specific evidence of the achievement of these measures and the related challenges is contained in the following discussion of this report.

## 2.1.3 Measurement of USDOL Common Indicators

Target figures for the indicators that define the project's objectives were established at the outset. The Technical Reports from September 2005 and March 2006 present a picture of OPTIONS' progress. For the most part, OPTIONS achieves its targets. For the prevention objective, the actual figure of the combined vulnerable and exploited children enrolled in education programs is 14,552. The target for the full implementation of the project is 13,500.<sup>3</sup>

In nonformal education, persistence increased from 70% (baseline) to 82% for the My Better Future (MBF) enrollees; however, due to a lag time between the basic and post-literacy stages in Banteay Meanchay, many students were lost and the persistence rate was only 57%. For the 2004–05 school year, persistence in formal education programs increased from 85% (baseline) to 90% at the primary education level (figures are not yet available for 2005–06). At the lower

<sup>3</sup> Technical Report, March 2006. OPTIONS Program in Cambodia: Child Labor Education Initiative.

secondary education level, persistence declined slightly—from 80% to 76% in the 2004–05 school year. Statistics for the 2005–06 year will be reported in September.

Completion rates in the 2004–05 school year for formal education programs were 45% for primary and 35% for lower secondary. The rates for the first two cohorts have been recalculated in the September 2005 Technical Report, based on a revised methodology.<sup>4</sup> Completion data for NFE relate to two programs: the NFE package and the KAPE vocational education program. The first cohort of MBF learners had a completion rate of 48% (probably related to delays in implementing the pilot program, extending its length from a planned 18 months to 22 months), and the Banteay Meanchay literacy NFE program, with only two stages, had a completion rate of 64% (above the target). The completion rate vocational education program in Kampong Cham province for the last school year was 100%.

The increase in the dropout rate of scholarship at the secondary education level may be attributed primarily to economic reasons. With increasing economic pressures in rural Cambodia because of prolonged drought, especially in the provinces of Prey Veng and Kampong Cham, many families and young people are forced to migrate to seek work in the urban areas. The program has also come to understand the increased cohort survival phenomenon (the likelihood that the longer students are in a program, the higher the drop-out over time), which was not very well conceptualized when the PMP was designed.

The transition statistics have not been fully developed and reported annually. Part of the issue is that the definition seems to have changed, not the transition from one cycle to the next but rather from one program to another initiative (perhaps funded by others). OPTIONS has set target figures of beneficiaries who move from primary to lower secondary and lower secondary to upper—50% and 22%, respectively—but have not reported the actuals for 2004–05.<sup>5</sup> In the case of movement from formal education to vocational education programs, the project has achieved 26%, exceeding the 20% target, although the project team had expected the percentage to increase due to the popularity of the course in the previous year.

Because of the lack of baseline data and information on the trafficking and exploitation of children in Cambodia, the project does not really have a mechanism to measure precisely the expected impact on the Development Objective of reducing the trafficking and sexual exploitation of Cambodia children. However, considering the positive results of the project's specific purposes, it has effectively contributed to reducing the risks of vulnerable girls by ensuring their access to formal or nonformal education and providing the needed assistance

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<sup>4</sup> The original target completion figures (85% and 68%) were calculated with the understanding that completion happens at the end of each school year, rather than at the end of a programmatic cycle (i.e., end of primary or secondary school). The program has not gone back to recalculate target rates for completion following the new definition, as they do not have the historical data for this calculation. They are now using the actual completion rate for the first cohort as the baseline indicator.

<sup>5</sup> The reporting requirement on transition was dropped by USDOL from the Common Indicator table, but the transition between program cycles is being tracked internally by the program to help them understand the effectiveness of coordination and referral efforts. The original targets, however, do not seem appropriate as referrals are dependent on other programs and donors outside of the control of OPTIONS. (The original targets were set based on the experience of KAPE related to an internal referral system.)

(i.e., scholarship, rice), so they can remain and progress in school or apply the life skills and income-generating activities that they have learned from the project. Based on separate interviews with local stakeholders—parents, education authorities, teachers, officials in the local government in the two project sites visited, Prey Veng and Kampong Cham, the OPTIONS Project is making a positive impact in the communities by addressing problems on trafficking, unsafe migration, and exploitation of children, particularly girls.

#### **2.1.4 Data and Use of the Student Tracking System (STS)**

The Student Tracking System (STS) has proven frustrating for the OPTIONS project office as well as for the management staff of the partner organizations. The database was developed under a contract with Juarez and Associates; and although training was provided directly to the project, they have not been able to effectively and efficiently use the data for reporting or internal monitoring. The Project Director identifies the main problems as (1) the decision to use Khmer script based on its alleged dual language compatibility (which limits the staff who can use the system); (2) the basic issue of accuracy of data from the school system with no formal ID system, varying ways of spelling Cambodian names (even in Khmer script), and the tendency to change one's name or report it differently at different times;<sup>6</sup> and (3) finally its structure and functionality which currently requires 16 steps to aggregate the data and then to disaggregate it in order to report dropout and persistence data by cohort.

In the field using the STS is also viewed as a labor-intensive process. Where there is a full-time information management staff, such as KAPE in Kampong Cham, the STS has been useful and relatively easy to use. In Banteay Meanchay, where staff resources are limited, the work on STS has been viewed as difficult and time-consuming. As it is linked to the reporting requirements of the USDOL, the timely input of data is critical. However, in project areas where information flow is unavoidably slow, fulfilling the requirements of the STS has become a constant challenge. The evaluator learned that in the field Excel spreadsheets are often used to collect the required data.

Among the three project areas, the CARE project in Banteay Meanchay experiences the most difficulty in promptly updating the STS, mainly because of staff shortages, recent changes of key project staff, and the slow flow of information from the communities due to their geographical distance from each other and between the project field offices. Travel between communities is also compounded by poor road conditions, especially during the rainy season. This makes the periodic monitoring and data collection more time-consuming and expensive compared with the project sites in the other two provinces. To address the problem, CARE plans to establish a monitoring team in the target areas comprised of teachers and selected government counterparts at the local levels.

Discussion with the three project partners—WE, KAPE, and CARE, revealed that the system is useful and that the project partners would like to continue using it. They, however, expressed that

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<sup>6</sup> This issue is not unique to the STS but contributes to the frustration in using the system and the time devoted to providing accurate data.

it will take some time to be proficient in using the system. The type and quality of information that it generates are important and relevant, especially in tracking individual progress or changes, for education and certain social indicators. Several possible solutions have been discussed—use of a local group, an information technology NGO, to troubleshoot the process and facilitate the generation of reports, or sending a staff member from Juarez (the original contractor) to Phnom Penh to provide hands-on assistance. The recent resignation of the database manager further complicates efforts to resolve this significant issue for the project. It should be noted that some of the difficulties may relate to personnel capabilities and Cambodian-related data quality issues, but the STS has been problematic for other USDOL grantees, according to USDOL staff.

### **2.1.5 Use of Technical Assistance**

As part of the EI Program, the OPTIONS project was provided several types of technical assistance. They particularly valued the Management Systems International (MSI) support in reviewing the project's design and proposed indicators. The logical framework was discussed and challenged and staff found this a worthwhile exercise. Overall they gained a lot of expertise through the consultative process. The discussions around indicators and how to measure accomplishments of a complex project were important since indicators for OPTIONS have not remained fixed. At several points in the project, the project management team has felt comfortable to reassess and refine the measurement process. From both the project perspective and the outside evaluator's perspective this early form of technical assistance seems to be money well-spent and worth continuing. Subsequent to this process the Phnom Penh staff provided technical assistance on the same topic for their staff and partners since there had been significant staff changes over the first half of the project. They convened a meeting in December 2005 to review the M&E process. It was a capacity-building experience for the local teams and allowed them to gain more responsibility as they understood the PMP and systems better.

The work on the STS with Juarez, however, is subject to a more critical assessment. Many acknowledge that the development of one database for numerous EI projects with diverse goals and indicators is a challenging assignment. However, since the tool was not functioning as intended after almost three years into the grant, the product does not seem to the evaluators to have been worth the time and dollars expended. Not only has the system not been useful, but the technical assistance and documentation provided has not been adequate.

## **2.2 IMPLEMENTATION**

### **2.2.1 Implementation in Three Different Provinces with Three Different Partners**

Different sets of interventions in formal and nonformal education have been established in each of the targeted provinces:

- In Prey Veng province, World Education administers a scholarship program for at-risk children at the primary level (and has extended it to some lower secondary), a life skills curriculum enhancement program, teacher training, and NFE programs in literacy and

livelihood skills training, called My Better Future (MBF). WE had conducted a pilot project for UNICEF in Peng Veng prior to the OPTIONS funding.

- In Kampong Cham province, KAPE directs a scholarship program for at-risk children at the primary and lower secondary level, a life skills curriculum enhancement program for the primary level, a community-based life skills program at the primary and lower secondary levels, and a vocational skills training course for grade 9 graduates. Teacher training scholarship support has begun in this province as well. KAPE was well established in this province prior to the EI program.
- In Banteay Meanchay province, CARE is conducting a scholarship program for at-risk children at the primary level, a school awareness program on trafficking, and several NFE activities including basic literacy and post-literacy programs.

A number of interventions take place in all three provinces to further support program goals, including—

- Take home rice rations
- Community awareness raising
- Girls' support clubs/youth committee groups.

The project has different implementation strategies in each of the three project sites. This has advantages and disadvantages. A clear advantage is that the strategies are the results of carefully considered programming that is appropriate and responsive to the distinct and specific education and social issues of the three project sites. The experiences of the three provinces can provide valuable lessons in addressing education and child exploitation issues, given the different socio-economic contexts of the provinces. This approach also provides opportunities for sharing and cross-fertilization of learnings between project sites aimed at enriching and strengthening local strategies.

A clear example of sharing of strategies between project sites is the development of the Life Skills Education Program. Prey Veng's initiative of combining relevant development and self-confidence building lessons in the livelihood training component of the life skills education was highly effective; it is being adapted by the Kampong Cham project. The local management mechanisms of KAPE scholarship are also providing valuable lessons; the Prey Veng Project used them a model for its scholarship program.

One disadvantage is the complexity of understanding the differing education activities and local structures that have been created to manage the project activities. The local working groups have different names at different project sites, which can be confusing to other stakeholders who may be interested to know and learn about the project. These stakeholders include relevant government agencies, NGOs and donor agencies. In this mission, for example, it took time for the evaluation team to follow and understand the different strategies of the different project sites.

The same observation was expressed by the representative from The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), whose program to protect vulnerable children is cooperating with OPTIONS. She observed, however, that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. The Economics and Labor Officer at the U.S. Embassy opined that such a complex structure might make sustainability after the EI grant more difficult.

### **2.2.2 Performance in the Three Provinces**

The narrative in the technical reports submitted over the life of the grant and the site visits of the evaluation team to the provinces of Prey Veng and Kampong Cham generally attest to numerous successes, close monitoring of performance to reduce student retention or dropouts, addressing the challenges faced, and refinement of the program over time. Other sections in the Findings chapter provide more details about the issues addressed and accomplishments in these two provinces.

Unfortunately the evaluator did not observe in the province of Banteay Meanchay. However, discussions with project staff and other observers as well as the data and narrative presented in the technical reports indicate a number of issues which have confronted the project team in that province and provide some cause for concern. It is to be acknowledged that Banteay Meanchay, on the Thai border, is a difficult environment. CARE, the implementing partner organization, had never worked in the education field in that area before, and took almost a year setting up an office and getting staff in place. It has been hard to retain staff in that region and in general the local capacity seems lower than in the other two provinces. Moreover, the funding for this province was originally budgeted for only three years, with the expectation (or hope) that CARE could attract outside funds to sustain the activities. One example of implementation problems in the province is the long lag time between the two stages of the NFE literacy program, thereby reducing persistence. Other concerns mentioned have been the quality of the literacy programs, trouble in adapting life skills materials developed in Prey Veng, and understanding of gender concepts. They have also had the most trouble managing the data to document project performance.

### **2.2.3 Influencing Policy**

In addition to the delivery of educational services and awareness raising in three provinces described above, one of the planned outputs (Output 4) of the project relates to influencing policy ("Government policies and practices are informed and influenced by the work of OPTIONS program partners"). The primary responsibility of this output is with the OPTIONS partner The Asia Foundation (TAF), in collaboration with the other project partners and with oversight by the PMT. Their proposed agenda is to influence the development and implementation of local, regional, and national policies focused on the concerns of vulnerable children and their families. TAF was to have carried out applied policy research, policy dialogues at the district and provincial levels, national policy workshops, and strategic use of media. This component appears not to have been adequately addressed, in part because leadership and funding from TAF has not met expectations, especially for the third year's activities. The project has had some influence at the commune and provincial level based on the implementing partners' own grassroots efforts. OPTIONS has recently become involved in

national initiatives launched by organizations operating in the child labor arena. However, project staff acknowledges that the policy aspect of the intervention is behind schedule. The absence of a Policy Advisor currently and TAF's apparent lack of attentiveness to their leadership role may have hampered the impact that OPTIONS could have had in addressing policy issues to date.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2.4 Numbers of Beneficiaries

The most recent Technical Report submitted (for September 2005 through February 2006) describes the various formal and nonformal educational initiatives. Since the information is presented in narrative form and involves various provinces, various interventions, various cohorts, and various stages, it is difficult to follow the breakdown in the delivery of services for the period. The project does report 3,423 children newly enrolled during the period, but the table below aims to quickly depict where the effort is going by program in the most recent reporting period.<sup>8</sup> It would be helpful to have a succinct table in future reports given the complexity of OPTIONS design.

**Table 2: OPTIONS Delivery of Services, September 2005 to February 2006**

Project	Numbers (new or completed)
<b>Formal Education</b>	
Scholarship (primary)	1,007
Scholarship (lower secondary)	625
Life skills and curriculum enhancement, grades 5–6	1,582
Vocational and computer skills training (grade 8)	925
10-week vocational and/or computer training (not reported in STS)	2,569*
<b>Nonformal Education</b>	
Nonformal education (2-step, Banteay Meanchay)	
• 1st cohort	159 completed
• 2nd cohort	412 completed
• 3rd cohort	375 new

<sup>7</sup> Since May 2006, with a change in leadership at TAF, the OPTIONS Project Director notes that the situation has changed dramatically.

<sup>8</sup> The numbers of children who completed a level or were part of a new cohort or initiative are taken from the narrative in the 5th Technical Report to the U.S. Department of Labor (covering the period of September 2005 to February 2006), pp. 17–21. The difficulty for a report reader to construct such a table (and the question of whether the numbers match with OPTIONS data) underscores the challenge to fully understand what is happening in what programs from a narrative report.



Project	Numbers (new or completed)
My Better Future (3-step, Prey Veng)	
• 1st cohort	32 completed
• 2nd cohort, (1st stage)	397 completed
• 2nd cohort (2nd stage)	357 new
• 3rd cohort	396 new
Vocational training (9th grade graduates)	38 new
Shelter-based (Damnok Toek)	42 new

\* Not all vulnerable children.

## 2.2.5 Project Timeline

The project appears well on track to meet its stated purpose, targets and outputs as described in the project logframe. Despite setbacks brought by staff transitions, the project's performance and progress remains solid. Support of CARE for the designated activities in Banteay Meanchay province was intended to be only for three years. Some additional funds have been secured by CARE and carry-over OPTIONS money will provide resources to extend the program through 2006, but it is not clear if the established interventions will continue beyond that period.

## 2.2.6 Identifying At-risk Children

Identification of those children most at risk involves both definitions or criteria and an adequate referral system. Efforts have been made to adopt criteria for at-risk that all partners could agree to. As they had all been working in Cambodia prior to joining together in the OPTIONS program, they had their vulnerability criteria established: one in consultation with the ministry of social affairs (WE) and another in consultation with the ministry of education (KAPE). The partners have also talked with their local level counterparts to ensure that the most vulnerable would be identified and served. CARE's approach was brought into conformity with the others. At this point they use a seven-item set of criteria, with the wording just slightly different.

It was thought by the Project Director that the referral system in Peng Veng was the strongest, due to the earlier activities and influence of the Child Protection Network (an initiative of the Ministry of Social Affairs with technical assistance and financial support from UNICEF). Renewed efforts have been made to help the policies at the commune level of all three provinces and to strengthen the referral systems in Kampong Cham and Banteay Meanchay.

## 2.2.7 Services to Former Trafficking Victims

The majority of the children served by this program are not withdrawn or rescued or former trafficking victims. Just a small number of the 13,500 proposed beneficiaries were planned to be former exploited children—about 500. From the outset, the design of the program focused on at-risk children. In part this decision was based on internal capacity. These children require more in the way of social services and WE's experience was more rooted in education. Their feeling was that shelter-based NGOs were better prepared for this responsibility. OPTIONS now provides

shelter-based education and psychosocial support to trafficked and exploited children in Poipet, a border town with Thailand, through funding to an NGO (Damnok Toek—DT).<sup>9</sup>

OPTIONS supports formerly exploited children or Children in Need of Special Protection (CNSP) through its referral relationship with the provincial offices of social affairs in Prey Veng and Kampong Cham provinces. In the March 2006 progress report, 307 children referred to OPTIONS as CNSP children received scholarship support. Through a partnership with Mith Samlanh, the project also provides information and support for services to young migrants when they arrive in Phnom Penh.

As OPTIONS has been in place for about three years and WE has become more involved in joint organizations looking at child labor (including the Time Bound Program), they have developed a better understanding of CSE and the needs of these children. They would not rule out become more active in addressing these children's issues in the future.

### **2.2.8 The Scholarship Program**

The scholarship support provided consists of in-kind tools and materials required to attend school, such as uniforms, flip flops, book bags, notebooks, and pens. At the lower secondary level it may also include lunch support, and a bicycle or boarding support to respond to the distances involved between home and school. Special tutoring assistance is also provided at the lower secondary level. The Prey Veng Project mainly provides scholarship to girls in primary school, while the Kampong Cham Project also assists primarily girls at the lower secondary school level. More than 300 of the scholarship recipients were referred to OPTIONS by the Department of Social Affairs or social service NGOs.<sup>10</sup> They children who have survived trafficking or exploitive labor, or who have been identified as highly vulnerable, AIDS orphans or HIV/AIDS affected, or as having disabilities.

With support from the UN World Food Program (WFP), monthly rice assistance is also provided.<sup>11</sup> Special tutoring assistance is also provided to the scholarship recipients at the lower secondary school level. The tutoring for exams is made compulsory by school teachers to supplement their low salaries. The OPTIONS Program is looking into whether the funds currently provided are adequate, as the costs of education to parents seem to be increasing. It is important to note that the project team continues to monitor the content of the scholarship package and its effect on parental spending and children's needs—and has taken action to provide more pens when needed and to purchase better quality flip flops.

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<sup>9</sup> OPTIONS has been funding DT since January 2004. DT assists about 30 children at one time who stay at the center from 6 to 12 months before they are reintegrated with their families or are referred for long-term care in another facility. OPTIONS expects that they will assist an estimated 150 children through this arrangement by the end of the project.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the 300+ children who have been referred to date, in the next year the number referred by Social Affairs is expected to increase to a total of approximately 400. These referrals plus the anticipated 150 children funded through DT (described above) will enable the project to more than meet its target of serving more than 500 formerly exploited children.

<sup>11</sup> To date 5,494 metric tons of rice has been delivered, with a value of US\$2,729,000.

The Girls' Scholarship Program is well appreciated by the parents, who felt that it was an important intervention in deciding against sending their daughters to find city jobs. The parents reported that before the OPTIONS Project was instituted in their village, many parents were pushing their children to migrate and find work in the city. Almost all families would send their daughters to Phnom Penh, and many became victims of trafficking. This assertion may need to be further verified. Since there is no baseline data and information on the trafficking and exploitation of children from the target communities, the changes may be difficult to measure.

The scholarship, combined with rice assistance, proved effective in reducing dropouts among scholarship recipients. This, in turn, ensured that the girls remained protected from the dangers of trafficking and migration or from falling into an exploitive labor situation. OPTIONS project reporting demonstrates the factual data about low levels of dropouts. Interviews with teachers and school authorities in Prey Veng and Kampong Cham revealed that the project has successfully reduced school dropouts, especially for girls, in the areas where it is operating. It proved effective in keeping girls in school and out of trafficking and labor exploitation, according to community sources. This can be attributed to the scholarship program especially targeting girls, to the community-awareness activities, as well as the provision of rice assistance to families. Unfortunately, no data directly link rice assistance to decline in dropout rates.

A high degree of confidence and leadership qualities has been demonstrated by the girls in primary scholarship in Prey Veng. This was directly observed during a group interview by the evaluation team. The girls were actively engaged in the discussion and were enthusiastically answering the questions. Of the 10 girls interviewed, four reported that they were among the leaders in their class.

In both Prey Veng and Kampong Cham, scholarship recipients were found, on average, to perform better than their peers in school. In the project progress report of September 2005, it was noted that in Banteay Meanchay, 111 of the 773 scholarship beneficiaries who completed the year performed very well in their year-end examinations and were ranked among the top learners in their respective classes. A group interview with the lower secondary school scholarship recipients in Kampong Cham revealed a similar pattern. Of the 10 students who participated in the interview, three reported that they were among the top 10 outstanding students of their class.

In Kampong Cham, the scholarship students, as part of their involvement in the Girls Club activities, have expressed difficulties in monitoring and following up absentees in their group. They take this effort seriously and feel that more time and financial resources need to be allocated to undertake this work. They also expressed that they needed methods and skills to address the problem effectively.

### **2.2.9 Pilot Project with Working Children in the Brick Factory Sector**

Within the past year the project was asked by the Provincial Department of Social Affairs in Prey Vang to work with a special population of children living and working in seven brick factories. These children were seen as particularly vulnerable, as they are a very transient, migratory population. This initiative targets some of the most marginalized children in Cambodia (both those that are currently working and those who are too young but are at high risk of getting

involved in the work). OPTIONS consulted with ILO-IPEC (International Labour Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour) for guidance but found that they had little experience or guidance for working with the brick making sector. The project sees the work in the brick factory sector as an action research initiative that will inform its activities in the future in working with a highly specialized population. They expect to study this economy and the motivating factors for parents to allow their children to work in brick making, and to examine what other support services might be required to keep these children in school and out of factory work.

### **2.2.10 Improvements in Education: Access and Quality**

Cambodia's education system is known for its traditional system of rote learning and teacher-centeredness. This has been observed firsthand by the evaluator during her many years of work in the education sector in Cambodia and has been supported by education studies in the country. During the mission, the team observed actual classroom activities and teacher-learner interaction. Teachers participating in the project were found to have improved their methods and quality of teaching. In the case of Kampong Cham, this has been a combined result of their other project, which aims to promote child-friendly schools and which was well received by the government. Interaction between teachers and learners has increased, and the teaching approach has shifted to being child-centered rather than teacher-centered. During interviews with parents and children, the teachers were more patient and kinder to their students.

The project feels it is knowledgeable about improvements taking place in the schools. The OPTIONS staff monitors local classrooms, and they cite these observations and reviews as evidence of change in the quality of implementation in the classroom. Among the techniques for discerning quality and results, they have conducted observations, reviewed pre/post test scores, and looked at student work. The staff works to actively engage teachers in curriculum development efforts and awareness raising.

The local representatives from the Women's Affairs Office of Prey Veng and Kampong Cham were particularly enthusiastic about the benefits that the project has brought to the communities and the target groups. In Prey Veng, the Women's Affairs representative in the local working group noted that in the communities where OPTIONS is operating, trafficking and prostitution have decreased, if not completely stopped, although this assertion needs to be quantifiably verified. She attributes this decrease to the awareness-raising campaign about the risks of trafficking and the importance of girls' education aimed at parents and girls. The life skills training program was particularly successful in helping girls improve their circumstances and reduce their vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation. The training program did not only provide them with livelihood skills but also included relevant social and development messages that will enable them to protect themselves and build their self-confidence.

### **2.2.11 Effectiveness of Nonformal Education: Literacy, Life Skills, and Livelihood Training**

Life skills training for girls has been effective, as evidenced by the visible positive changes in their self-confidence and their display of leadership during interviews. They have also showed a good understanding and knowledge of relevant development issues, such as trafficking, unsafe migration, HIV/AIDS when questioned during interviews. The life skills trainings are highly appreciated by parents, teachers, and the girls. Interviews with the parents of girls participating in the NFE courses revealed a high appreciation of the benefits that their daughters receive from the project, which include learning about income-earning skills and how to manage a business, about environmentally sound crop and vegetable growing practices, about personal hygiene and reproductive health care and protection, and about developing social and communication skills such as building self-confidence. Sometimes there are problems, such as the girls cannot start a business after their training because they do not have capital funds. They may need to save money in order to start the business. Project directors are also trying to expand the types of vocational training that girls elect—so that there are fewer seamstresses (perhaps exceeding demand and more likely to lead to working in Phnom Penh garment factories) and more trained to raise animals or vegetables.

The vocational program in Prey Veng, which includes a period of participatory market assessment, appears to the evaluator to be a valuable model for long-term sustainability of the girls' vocational initiatives. The girls' participation in the local market assessment have led to increased awareness and support among community members, parents and girls of the income-generation opportunities within their community, thereby discouraging migration. Through their participation in the data collection and analysis, the girls obtain information of the viability of the livelihood opportunities. A better picture of the market demands of possible business/livelihood opportunities encouraged the girls to attend and complete the program. For example, out of the 35 girls who participated in the first cohort, only two dropped out; they were offered employment in the garment factories in Phnom Penh.

In Prey Veng province, the literacy and life skills training provided to girls positively affects the girls' perceptions about improving their conditions and status in the community and in their families, and in transforming attitudes on girls' education. This was clearly demonstrated in the interviews during the evaluation mission with the participants of the program.

In Prey Veng, some parents and participating girls think that the NFE training program comprising six months of literacy training and another six months for livelihood training is too long. Some families are so poor that they cannot allow their daughters not to help in earning income for the family for such a long period. However, with the rice assistance that WFP gives to the families of the participating girls, the attendance has improved and parents were keen to let their daughters complete the training program.

## **2.2.12 Activities to Raise Community Awareness**

The working groups in the various communities plan activities to reinforce the message of the importance of education—especially for girls—and encourage resistance to migrating and dealing with traffickers. Campaigns designed to suit each community involved such things as posters, musical performances, and role plays were tried in Prey Veng during the Khmer New Year holiday when young people return to their villages. School wide awareness efforts used materials designed by IOM called *Shattered Dreams*, an adaptation and translation of materials originally designed for rural Thailand. It was also used with local authorities and teachers in Banteay Meanchay. A new radio initiative was launched to provide engaging radio plays, mini-dramas, songs, and information spots through satellite technology in partnership with Equal Access which provides digital media programming in remote areas. Other initiatives were fostered by youth committees and girls' clubs to organize meetings with their peers and parents to discuss what they had learned. The philosophy employed by OPTIONS has been to pilot an activity in a district, look at its success both in terms of implementation and results, and then determine whether it will be used again (with modifications where indicated) in that place and in others.

Awareness activities are integral to the design of OPTIONS Program. They think that a strength of their methods is that they integrate them into many different activities, so the topic gets raised and reinforced in orientations, monitoring visits in homes, and meetings with teachers and community members. They have worked to engage youth in communicating these messages, which is a positive activity for both the sender and receiver of the awareness raising. No studies have been undertaken to try to link school attendance to an awareness campaign. A survey on community awareness and attitudes was planned as baseline research. Researchers at the University of Phnom Penh had been commissioned to carry it out, but analysis and reporting have been delayed several times. As of the March 2006 Technical Report, the survey results were still not available as indicators of Output 2—increased community awareness of child trafficking and improved attitudes toward education.

Interviews by the evaluation team with parents and community leaders in Prey Veng and Kampong Cham revealed that the migration of girls to Phnom Penh and other urban centers to look for work has significantly reduced. They indicated that this change of behavior could be attributed to the scholarship program for girls and the project's activities to raise awareness of the dangers of blind migration and trafficking and of the importance of education for children, especially girls. Education and life skills opportunities that the project offers to the target groups encouraged girls and their parents to decide against migration. There is, however, no accurate mechanism in place to measure this change in attitude and behavior, and the overall effect on the trafficking and exploitation situation of the target communities.

Awareness raising activities in Prey Veng have led members of the community to want to extend program interventions more broadly to boys as well as girls. Interviews with parents, teachers, and members of local working groups revealed that there is a desire to extend the project to include boys, especially those who have dropped out of school and are likely to migrate to the cities to find employment. The members of the local working group reported that as the economic and agricultural situation continues to deteriorate in the province, there is an increasing

trend in migration among young males. To date, there are no development programs for out-of-school and unemployed boys, especially those under 18 years old. Many of them leave their villages and migrate to the cities, and likely face the same risks and dangers of being exploited and abused as the girls. The March 2006 Technical Progress Report shows that of the 14,552 beneficiaries to date, 84% were girls.

OPTIONS project officers in Prey Veng and Kampong Cham have recognized this issue as well, and they said they will review the resources and flexibility of the project to address the needs of boys. They noted that the project may be able to assist boys only in a limited way, as the project is originally designed to address girls' risks of being trafficked and exploited. An observer of the OPTIONS program expressed the view that perhaps these individuals are more focused on providing educational opportunities (which are obviously needed) and do not realize the generational impact of educating young women who will pass along attitudes and behavior to support the importance of educating girls within their families and communities.

### **2.2.13 Building Capacity**

The OPTIONS Project Director identified building capacity as a key issue for the program. This has implications for delivery of services and monitoring of activities in the provinces and longer-term considerations about sustainability. The design of the program which varies the interventions based on the community needs and relies on local leaders, teachers, and young people to help implement the community awareness and follow-up activities lends itself to strengthen local capacity. The capacity and enthusiasm of the Local Working Groups (LWG) is critical. The program has found variations, and they have seen clear links between demonstrated leadership and effectiveness (and the lack of leadership and lack of results).

Attention is being given to both increase the capacity of government agencies (especially local officials) and community-based groups and individuals. A great deal of training has taken place for district and province-level staff with which OPTIONS relies on or needs to coordinate with. Of particular concern has been the very limited understanding by government or NGO works in rural areas of education and support services available locally or nationally.

The interview with the Girls' Education Working Group (GEWG) comprising District Education Officials, representative of District Office of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation (DOSAVY), commune representative for Women's Affairs, and representatives of school teachers and teachers of the Life Skills Training Program revealed that they are very much involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the OPTIONS Project at the local levels. They have expressed a high level of support and cooperation for the project, and they feel positive about its results, especially in providing access to education and training opportunities to poor girls who may be at risk of dropping out of school or of being trafficked or exploited.

An important concern expressed by government officials, however, is that they have increasing responsibilities in the project, as well as what they saw as overlapping activities and responsibilities in their government roles for government-funded projects. They suggested that it might be good for the OPTIONS to coordinate activities with the government. Project participants at the national level of the government are increasingly recognizing the positive

results of the project. OPTIONS will have to consider this perception of too many demands and possibly overlapping responsibilities in planning for the sustainability mechanisms of the project.

Another concern is that the government partners, both at the local and national levels, are facing difficulties with competing demands for their time from NGOs and UN agencies working in similar fields of education and social services, and child labor and protection. As there are limited government staff and officials with adequate capacity to participate effectively in projects, the few capable individuals are forced to take multiple tasks in various projects in the sectors on which they are working. Often, this negatively affects outputs and quality of delivery.

In addition, the low salaries for government workers also serve as disincentives to commit time on projects unless there are provisions for financial compensation for their involvement in projects. OPTIONS project is currently studying this issue, and the onsite evaluator was told that the project may propose to the government to include in the next education budget allowances for education officials engaged in the project activities.

The interview with members of the district-level working group in Prey Veng revealed that one of the challenges that they face with their responsibilities for the OPTIONS project consists of the competing demands of their time between their government tasks and their OPTIONS tasks. This concern has been discussed with the project manager in Prey Veng, and she said that this would be addressed when the activities of OPTIONS are made an integral part of the education program (especially the life skills program) of the government. OPTIONS life skills education program has been recognized and appreciated by the government, and the project's life skills approach will be included in the current policy formulation of life skills education program of the country and is planned to be mainstreamed. The main limitations will be the ability of OPTIONS to scale up and the capacity of others (officials and teachers) to extend this curriculum.

Moreover, the local working groups acknowledge that they are learning so much from the project especially on tasks related to education project management, and in implementing and managing life skills training program. Through the OPTIONS Project, they have learned to appreciate and understand the life skills education concept, especially since, as they pointed out, the Ministry of Education has not explained the concept to them in detail. They particularly support the OPTIONS life skills concept that focuses on self-development, problem solving, teamwork, and social and communication skills. They particularly pointed out that not only the girl-participants benefit from the lessons in the life skills program, but they themselves are interested in the lessons, and they are also learning and gaining knowledge that they can also use in for their self-development and their family's development.

Not all districts have been equally successful in engaging stakeholders and building local capacity. OPTIONS continues to oversee these situations and continues its efforts to build capacity.



## **2.2.14 Potential Problems**

There may also be a need for the project to remain vigilant about the quality of school management and its potential impact on the project's initiative. For example in Kampong Cham, one school was collecting bicycle parking fees from students at 1,900 riels/month. In addition, it may be useful to assess the strengths and weaknesses of placing all the scholars in one class, as reported by one school participating in the KAPE scholarship project in Kampong Cham. As a general practice having all scholarship students singled out and put together may not be educationally or socially desirable, and the evaluator suggests that the project further look at possible unintended consequences.

In Kampong Cham Province, KAPE cited reasons other than poverty for girls-scholars dropping out from school; they are weak academic performance and not having access to textbooks. Especially the 2005–06 school year, there has been a significant delay of delivery of textbooks in schools from the central Ministry of Education. At the time of the evaluation mission in February 2006, many schools in the country still had not received textbooks for their students.

The strong “pull” for opportunities of garment factory work in Phnom Penh also continuously poses as a strong distraction for girls, even with scholarship assistance, to stay in school. This is compounded by the limited employment opportunities in the provinces and by the continuous crop destruction brought by drought in Prey Veng and Kampong Cham. In Kampong Cham, KAPE is addressing this issue by providing information to the target groups on safe migration. Information materials on safe migration has been developed and distributed by OPTIONS' NGO Partner, Mith Samlanh. These materials are also distributed in entry points of young migrants in Phnom Penh.

In Prey Veng, the local working groups pointed out that one of the concerns of the project is how to encourage girls from very poor families to stay in school or to stay and complete the nonformal education and life skills program of the project. Often, because of extreme poverty and with continued negative effects of drought on food security, even with the project's assistance, some girls would still drop out from the program, as their families would decide to leave and migrate. While this happens to a limited number of participants, the project feels the need to address the problem. They suggested that home visits should be promptly pursued once a girl is absent over a certain length of time. In some cases, the home visit may bring positive results; however, in some situations, it is not successful. The OPTIONS project has had difficulties in ensuring that the working groups at the local level conduct home visits to monitor attendance. It has been noted that the scholarship committees in Kampong Cham have not conducted the required home visits. An effort was made to have a peer support network conduct follow-up visits to monitor attendance with their peers. This also has not proved effective, and participants feel that they do not have adequate training. As long as the government does not provide safety nets to families affected by drought or does not address the water supply and management issues in agricultural communities, development initiatives in the affected communities—including education projects—will be negatively affected.

## **2.3 PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION**

The partnership and coordination with key NGO partners and government partners, especially at the local levels, look good and successful.

### **2.3.1 Partnerships Established and Where They Are Strong**

The basic design of the OPTIONS program is the meshing of partners with experience in community development and education in Cambodia to provide services and enhance local capacity. Prior to this grant, WE, KAPE, and CARE had all worked in fields associated with child labor—if not directly in that specialty. OPTIONS has also worked collaboratively with other local NGOs that are active in child labor initiatives in Cambodia, and who can provide referrals, support, and technical assistance. Coordination has been critical to ensure that the program’s goals are realized and that cross-fertilization of initiatives works to the benefit of the direct beneficiaries and the communities. Output 3 addresses the effectiveness of OPTIONS implementing partners. According to the March 2006 Technical Report, the percentage of committees able to manage program implementation at a satisfactory level increased over five periods from 80% at baseline to 87%. Performance was measured using a standard assessment tool developed by KAPE and adopted by the other partners.<sup>12</sup>

The link between KAPE and WE seems particularly strong. Staff turnover and other issues appear to have affected some of the program delivery and communication with CARE. Both CARE and The Asia Foundation (TAF) have a large portfolio of initiatives and their work in OPTIONS constitutes just a small amount of their activities. The advocacy and policy-related activities with TAF have languished as well, but there has been a renewed effort now that there is new in-country leadership at TAF.

### **2.3.2 Coordination with Government**

A strength of the partnership is that several key government ministries had previous experience with the participating organizations and had a great deal of confidence in their knowledge and dedication. A strong working relationship has been in place with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). OPTIONS has brought educational quality and interventions that did not exist before. MoEYS is particularly interested in including life skills education into the formal education program, and OPTIONS is working at the provincial, district, and cluster level to put the life skills and curriculum enhancement activities in place. Although there were also links to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSAVY), there has been a detectable gap in support due to the ministry’s inability to address the broad spectrum of social service needs. On the positive side, dialogues have begun with the newly established (within the last year) Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training, and the program seems

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<sup>12</sup> Most recently the project found it desirable to add “good” category in the capacity scale (above satisfactory) and to change the indicator to look at the percentage of committees scoring “good” on the assessment scale. This will help to more finely measure improvement in capacity and sets the performance bar higher.

opportunities to contribute to policy development as child labor becomes a more prominent topic.

Government partners at the local and national levels expressed high support for the project; they would like it to expand to other areas and to continue beyond its intended four years. Officials of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA) interviewed expressed a high level of support for the project and a desire for the program to expand to other provinces. The cooperation between OPTIONS and the provincial units of the Department of Social Affairs and social service NGOs are strengthening because of increased referrals of exploited and trafficked children to OPTIONS for the education support and needs of the children.

### **2.3.3 Collaboration of Organizations in Cambodia**

A civil society network is being launched with the leadership of ILO-IPEC, World Vision, World Education, and three local NGOs. The Civil Society Network Against Child Labor (CSNACL) is seen as providing additional opportunities to influence the discussion and actions related to child labor at the national, provincial, district, and commune levels.

OPTIONS coordinates with and contributes to the provincial and national-level efforts of ILO-IPEC in areas where their interest areas overlap. One example of this was the support that the OPTIONS Program offered to the National Children's Forum, which was organized in the fall of 2004 by the Cambodian National Council on Children, with major support from ILO-IPEC. At the provincial level, OPTIONS has sought the participation of ILO-IPEC provincial representatives in provincial events and policy workshops.

The different NGO partners greatly appreciate the support that they receive from OPTIONS, both financial and technical. For example, the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC) and Ponleu Kumar (PK) expressed that the technical guidance and capacity building that they receive from OPTIONS are very helpful in effectively implementing and managing their own scholarship programs for girls.

UNICEF Child Protection Section (UNICEF-CPS) expressed high appreciation of OPTIONS cooperation and coordination with UNICEF's child protection project in Prey Veng. UNICEF is working with OPTIONS in improving the referral network for social and education services for children-survivors of trafficking and exploitation. UNICEF-CPS and OPTIONS meet on a quarterly basis with the local government partners for this initiative. UNICEF is pleased with the high sense of professionalism of OPTIONS staff and the high quality of the project's outputs in Prey Veng, especially in providing access to formal and nonformal education to the girl-participants.

### **2.3.4 Leveraging Resources**

OPTIONS have formed good alliances with like-minded organizations. For example, the International Organization of Migration (IOM) had produced materials related to a young girl lured into commercial sex work. Originally developed for Thailand, it had been translated but IOM did not have a good strategy for dissemination. OPTIONS were able to incorporate the

materials into their awareness raising strategy—with good results in the communities where it has been used and yielding good will and respect from an organization working in trafficking.

OPTIONS has been quite successful in obtaining matching funds—US\$1.1 million has been generated from other donors, such as UNICEF and the McKnight Foundation. They have collaborated with the Cambodian Government to pick up certain expenses such as the salary of basic literacy instructors and the space for classes. An extremely important resource is the rice ration from the World Food Programme, which goes to scholarship students and children in the NFE component.

### **2.3.5 Working with Other USDOL Projects**

Initially coordination with ILO-IPEC was not very promising. As the Time Bound Programme (TBP) began full implementation of its activities in Cambodia more than a year ago, greater interaction is taking place. They were able to give valued input to the consultants working on TBP. It is hoped that with the formation of the Civil Society Network Against Child Labor there will be more opportunities to work together and permit the sharing of perspectives, as TBP works more nationally and OPTIONS is very aware of the reality of rural Cambodia. With the planned ILO-TBP initiative on repatriation of child workers in domestic work from Phnom Penh, it is hoped that OPTIONS can cooperate with ILO-TBP in provision of assistance for access to quality and relevant education for this group in the three provinces in which the project works.

The new network will be also be a venue to communicate with the Circle Project of Winrock International. The Director of the OPTIONS Program expressed disappointment that although OPTIONS had familiarity with the relevant local NGOs and had offered support, there was no input or guidance sought during the planning phase of that project.

### **2.3.6 Challenges Faced**

One challenge faced in terms of coordination and partnerships is the saturation of donors in Cambodia today. It requires organizations to meet frequently and stay on top of what others are doing, while still carrying out the work they are committed to doing. For the most part these organizations have tried to remain connected to each other. For programs focused on education, it was somewhat difficult in the beginning to establish recognition that they belonged at the table talking about trafficking and migration issues.

During the interview with the representative of UNICEF-CPS, there was an expressed need to try continuously to improve coordination between UNICEF and OPTIONS, especially in common areas of work and where the government counterparts are the same people. For example, in common areas of operation, the same government staff would hold overlapping positions with similar projects of UNICEF and OPTIONS.

Another particular concern is the difference of financial incentives provided to government partners between UNICEF and OPTIONS Project. It may be useful to hold a dialogue and agreement with UNICEF on standardizing meeting allowances of government partners. Currently, UNICEF gives US\$5/meeting plus transport costs, while the OPTIONS Project only

pays US\$3/day. This difference in government staff meeting allowance may have an implication on the level and quality of cooperation and support of government partners with the OPTIONS Project.

## **2.4 PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

### **2.4.1 Management Structure**

Technical oversight and support to the project is provided by World Education's headquarters in Boston, Massachusetts. That organization has a well-regarded portfolio of youth and education initiatives in Asia and other parts of the world. WE staff provide the core of the Program Management Team (PMT) which manages the program at the country-level. This team is made up of the Program Director (Ingrid Martonova), the Education Specialist (Susan Gollifer), the Senior Technical Advisor (Liesbeth Roolvink), and the National Program Coordinator (Chan Solin). Representatives from KAPE, CARE, and TAF are also members of the PMT. An Advisory Committee of high level officials from MoEYS, MoSALVY, and MWA was established to provide general direction through semi-annual meetings. The project also established working groups at the commune/cluster and district levels with local government officials.

Regular visits to project sites are undertaken by the Project Management Team and Technical Advisors. The visits aim to provide regular technical guidance to field activities and to oversee the progress of their implementation. Susan Gollifer provides technical guidance to the Prey Veng project, while Liesbeth Roolvink provides technical guidance to Kampong Cham. The provincial teams in these two provincials are assuming greater management responsibility for day-to-day operations, as these two individuals joined the project in the second half of 2005. Phalmean Tim of CARE is in charge of providing technical inputs and guidance for the project activities in Banteay Meanchay.

### **2.4.2 Staffing and Leadership**

"One of the strengths of OPTIONS are the people who work for it," asserted Ingrid Martonova, the Project Director. By all accounts Ms. Martonova is a strong and knowledgeable leader. She has served as Project Director since the start of OPTIONS. She had worked from the WE headquarters in the U.S. on Cambodia-based projects for seven years before assuming this role. Staff turnover has taken place at senior levels since 2005. Several of the staff who have left the project are still engaged with WE and therefore available for queries of a technical or historical nature. OPTIONS has recruited highly experienced and capable project technical advisers and staff. Despite the transition of staff at the management level, the teamwork spirit and the high motivation of staff remained steady. This can be mainly attributed to the fact that the technical advisers and senior staff have cooperated on other education projects in Cambodia in their past jobs. Many speak Khmer. The strong leadership of Ingrid Martonova is also well appreciated by the advisers and staff. These transitions, however, have placed a burden on others as they learn their jobs and become acquainted with the stakeholders in the three provinces. Particularly troubling is the turnover in Banteay Meanchay and the difficulties CARE has had in replacing key staff.

The PMT meets monthly to review progress on enrolment and retention of beneficiaries and discuss issues related to the different performance output areas. Interviews with the technical advisers and project officers of OPTIONS revealed that the monthly management meetings are highly effective for sharing regular updates of activities in the three sites including an assessment of their progress and constraints. The meeting is also an opportunity for planning and coordinating further project activities.

### **2.4.3 Management Issues**

Project managers of the Prey Veng and Kampong Cham provinces have expressed a need to continue to develop their management and technical skills and that of their staff in order to ensure the quality of their activities and outputs. The project managers have also highlighted the need for management to review their workload because they feel that they have more tasks than they can manage. They are particularly concerned that as OPTIONS progresses and new activities are implemented, they would need more assistance in managing and overseeing the activities.

The Advisory Committee has proven to be ineffective in giving guidance to the project given the changing representatives sent to the semi-annual meeting. As a result of preparation for the National Forum (in which district, province and national-level government agencies and NGOs discussed issues and challenges with senior officials of the Ministries of Education, Social Affairs, and Women's Affairs), where OPTIONS met individually with each ministry, they have decided to continue the practice of individual meetings rather than the more formal Advisory Committee to obtain more meaningful engagement. There are other committees in which all relevant ministries can meet together, including CNCC and the EFA committee, and the one-on-one model clearly demonstrated that it was more effective.

The Local Working Groups (LWG) have also expressed a desire to receive more trainings and capacity building, particularly in managing the scholarship program and in planning and monitoring project activities. The varied capacities and engagement of the LWGs have been a source of some concern.

### **2.4.4 Challenges in Data Management and Reporting**

New staff and the increased responsibilities of field staff prompted the organization of a two-day meeting in December 2005 to address M&E requirements. The workshop provided an opportunity to make clear about how the monitoring system and data linked to the original and revised logical framework. Besides providing a chance to renew the project's common understanding of the PMP with the local team and allow them to assume more responsibility (as part of desired capacity building), it gave the PMT a time for reflection on the process.

The Student Tracking System (STS) still is not a tool that meets the needs of the project. Work-arounds (use of Excel in the field) and complicated processes are required to carry out the quantitative reporting required by USDOL. It was not clear whether the project had the appropriate database manager, but a change in personnel may allow this position to be staffed

with someone who can address the complexities of this system or provide guidance in getting external technical assistance.

As data collection seems to be a complex and arduous process, It was not clear through interviews the extent to which data is used for formative purposes—and not just as part of reporting on required indicators.

The production of semi-annual technical reports also appears to be extremely time-consuming. USDOL project managers describe the reports from the OPTIONS project as extremely detailed and interesting, but for monitoring and compliance purposes, more time may be spent on the reports than necessary—considering many other responsibilities of the PMT.

## **2.5 SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT**

### **2.5.1 Strategies for Sustainability**

The original strategies for promoting sustainability of OPTIONS' goals and initiatives past the four year grant period were built on the partners' programmatic models of working through local structures (such as the Local Scholarship Committees of KAPE and the Girls' Education Working Groups of WE) and to provide significant resources to build capacity of NGO and government staff at the district and province level. As the original OPTIONS design took into account the government planning and policy directions of various relevant government ministries, especially MoEYS, it was thought the project would be in the vanguard and help establish some proposed new initiatives, such as scholarships and NFE programs. The OPTIONS partners saw their role as moving EFA planning into more practical terms with high-quality interventions and local empowerment.

### **2.5.2 Efforts to Promote Sustainability and Continuation of Education Strategies**

There are numerous areas where OPTIONS believes the strategies they employed has had (and will continue to have) significant impact. These include NFE programs, the life skills concept and the curriculum developed, and improvements in the education system at the cluster level through capacity building. A great deal of effort and resources has been spent on enhancing capacity: strengthening school directors, promoting leadership in teachers, the increased emphasis on and training for monitoring and follow-up support. The Project Director pointed to the strong leadership in various districts in Prey Veng and Kampong Cham which has enhanced the overall performance of the education system. She saw them as determined to continue the work that has been started.

During the evaluation, the local working groups reflected on the possible continuity of project activities, even after the project period, and made suggestions and proposed steps that OPTIONS can consider to ensure the sustainability of the project. The local working groups communicated that they are committed to continue their work even at the end of the project grant. Even as they are particularly concerned that they may have to perform their tasks with reduced or without financial incentives, they believe that the project activities are important and critical and have to

be sustained. They suggested that if OPTIONS will not be there to provide them financial support for their work, it could help by continuing to share learning materials and resources to the communities, and if possible, help them find new NGO partners.

In Prey Veng, the local working group interviewed in this evaluation (G-group) expressed its commitment to continue the activities of the project, even at the end of the project period. However, the group felt that since it is government staffed, the project should find ways to sustain its financial incentives. Viable and realistic solutions to this sustainability question should be carefully studied. Experiences on development cooperation with the government show that this will be a tremendous challenge to the project.

The members of D-group also indicated a similar positive response. They said that they would seek the assistance of other similar NGOs to support the continuity of the project's activities. However, they think that the activities may not be as extensive as when OPTIONS has provided support. Particularly, the scholarship program, because of the costs involved, may be difficult to continue, but the literacy and livelihood training can be sustained. The Community Learning Centers (CLCs) can help to continue some of OPTIONS NFE activities. Also, they can still undertake the activities to raise the awareness of parents and girls.

Given economic conditions in Cambodia and the limited resources of the Ministry of Education, all people interviewed on this topic observed that interventions that require resources would not be funded by the RGC and would not continue. One example would be the primary school scholarships, which appear effective in retention, but would require a new source of funding. Although the government currently provides scholarship assistance at the lower secondary level, that program is imperiled by limited funding, delays, and poor implementation.

### **2.5.3 Sharing of Lessons Learned**

The project teaches many valuable lessons and experiences that can be documented and shared, especially because the underlying philosophy of the partners is to pilot various interventions and assess their performance and then share them in other settings (adapting where needed). Cross-fertilization has been a basic approach in implementing OPTIONS in three distinct regions by three distinct partners. An initiative to compile and document the lessons and best practices is currently underway by OPTIONS. A "Good Practice" publication is planned for production in the final year of the grant (to be disseminated in July 2007). An implementation guide/manual begun in 2006 provides some of the seed materials. The draft is said to be a comprehensive manual with lots of materials, such as strategies, forms, curricula. It addresses the practical issues confronted by practitioners in Cambodia, and the project partners are excellent sources of this type of technical assistance. The Project Director noted that there is a dire need for good documentation in Cambodia. Target users are the relevant government agencies, as well as education NGOs and donors. The well-documented experiences of the OPTIONS project will enrich the field, and this publication can come none too soon.



#### **2.5.4 Impacts Identified at the Stakeholder Workshop**

Even at this midterm stage, there are evidences of the benefits and the positive impact reported by project partners at different levels. This discussion was mainly drawn from the sharing and consultation in the Stakeholder Workshop held during the evaluation field work. Project partners in the NGO community and the local governance structures participated in the workshop. The information is mostly qualitative and should be quantifiably verified to the extent possible.

**Capacity Building:** Enhancing understanding and analysis of education and social services issues on child trafficking and exploitation by government partners, especially at the local levels; strengthened network of child protection.

**Education:** Girls' access to quality education and vocational training; reduced dropout rate of girls from school; increased female literacy; pioneering efforts to provide access of reintegrated children to education, although in limited numbers.

**Behavior and Attitude Change:** Reduced domestic violence; reduced migration of girls; building girls' self-confidence and increased understanding of their role in development; increased interest in learning among girls; parents' recognition of the importance of education for their children, especially participation of girls (in Prey Veng and Banteay Meanchay) in community development.

#### **2.5.5 Other Impacts**

In addition to the areas where the work of OPTIONS is most likely to be sustained, discussed above (Section 2.5.2), there are a number of other significant impacts of the project. One is clearly the services and programs delivered to vulnerable and exploited children—exceeding the targeted number of direct beneficiaries enrolled in education programs by the fifth reporting period.

Although current tracking of education data by student is still rudimentary (on paper), the project has modeled an emphasis on data about the individual child not the classroom. The project would like to expand capacity to analyze trends and help the ministry track those who dropout and reenter the system. There have been preliminary discussions about the use of data in NFE. One critical ingredient is a database that is more user-friendly from which data can be extracted to inform planning and policy.

The project may leave a legacy in beginning the dialogue between social affairs and education agencies. There have been changes and increased understanding of understanding the complex and interrelated issues of addressing the needs of vulnerable children. At the local level there has been constructive coordination and working together on a more regular basis.

There are two education areas where OPTIONS may successfully influence government policies: Life Skills Education and Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups. The life skills education strategies and experiences of OPTIONS (in both formal and NFE) can be a valuable input to the Life Skills Education Policy of Cambodia. OPTIONS is actively participating in and contributing to government's discussions in this policy formulation. The Ministry of Education

appreciates and recognizes OPTIONS pilot activities in this area of their expertise; it is seriously considering incorporating its experiences in the Life Skills Education policy of Cambodia. In the area of Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups, especially in formulating policies that will link education and social services, requiring inter-agency cooperation and coordination, OPTIONS may expect a limited success. This is in recognition to the continued constraints that the project faces in sustaining policy dialogues at the national level among its three key partner-agencies: education, social affairs, and women's affairs. Inter-agency coordination in the Government of Cambodia has remained a challenge for many projects in the country. Project reports, discussions and meetings with the government partners and stakeholders reveal that the project has been effective and successful in the policy dialogues in improving implementation of linking education strategies and social services at the local governance structures and up to the provincial level. Policy recommendations at the local levels for this particular issue are therefore likely to be acted upon than at the national level.

## **2.6 LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES**

OPTIONS is a program being implemented by a learning organization. Their careful reflection on operations nationally and on the delivery of various programs and activities in three different provinces has provided ample opportunity to consider the lessons they have learned. The project has indicated that it is developing a publication of “good practices.” It is expected that the program staff can speak to many important lessons and good practices in designing and implementing strategies on education linked to social services. It certainly can serve as a good model for promoting government-NGO cooperation and partnership in addressing the relationship between combined issues of lack of access to quality education and trafficking and exploitation. Given the experience they have in the field and the innovative approaches they have taken, it is critical that that information be disseminated as soon as feasible—and not wait until the end of the project.

In their technical reports, project staff often report lessons that have emerged in the current period. Those have already been documented to USDOL. The following lessons are derived from evaluator observations and interviews and are thought to be those with particular applicability to other projects.

- **Importance of Timing.** The timing of activities has a considerable impact. The project has learned to provide awareness and outreach activities in the communities during the Khmer New Year holiday since youth who have migrated return to their villages and can attract others to follow their examples. A second application of taking timing into account is that follow-up activities in the second or third stage of a program need to take place without delays or a considerable attrition will take place.
- **Role of External Factors.** The most well thought out interventions can be thwarted by factors beyond their control. The OPTIONS project has been affected by environmental conditions (such as droughts, crop failures, and floods); mobility of families; and government shortfalls in providing materials, paying salaries, or monitoring bad practices. It may be hard to plan for this, but contingency responses are part of good design.

- **Involvement at the Local Level.** OPTIONS prides itself on the curriculum development which includes teachers, community leaders, and often the children themselves. They have found that this contributes to the quality and relevance of the material.
- **Importance of Linkages to Ministry of Education.** A strategy embraced by the OPTION partners is to work closely with Education Ministry staff at the local level to ensure that innovations and improvements developed by the project are being directly tested in the schools and NFE sites. This emphasis promotes sustainability. On the policy level, connecting at the national level allowed OPTIONS to provide an example of a life skills curriculum in the schools and now to support MOEYS in their new policy on mainstreaming the life skills curriculum.
- **Emphasis on Local Content.** By varying and customizing activities and program and curriculum development in the different provinces, OPTIONS has taken into account that localizing the interventions promotes ownership, “fit,” and sustainability.
- **Closely Monitor Activities/Programs.** By looking at data on family spending for school materials, the project determined that the scholarship package was inadequate—that more pens were needed throughout the year and that the flip flops were of low quality. They were responsive to these findings and made appropriate adjustments. There are numerous examples of the program’s responsiveness to what is actually happening in the field.
- **Vocational Training that Reflects Demand.** The project has been working in a variety of programmatic ways to strengthen the vocational training, especially for girls, and to encourage alternatives to students selecting sewing as an activity, as there is likely to be lower demand (and payoff) with a surplus of seamstresses. This focus also encourages girls to migrate to sewing factories in Phnom Penh.
- **Planned Indicators May Change.** OPTIONS has found that a number of the indicators originally designed to measure performance were not appropriate or ultimately did not reflect the reality of how the project can most effectively operate for its stakeholders and in the donor community of Cambodia. They were flexible in making changes, and USDOL was flexible in accepting them.
- **Critical Role of Life Skills Training.** The project (and the Ministry of Education) has come to really appreciate the value of development of life skills for children in school and in NFE. In their thinking this curriculum promotes critical thinking, problem solving, and confidence in meeting challenges—and these skills constitute an important ingredient in resisting the enticements of child labor and migration with risky and exploitive possibilities.

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## **III CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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### **3.1 CONCLUSIONS**

The OPTIONS Project is well designed and has experienced many accomplishments in its almost three years of implementation. The project strategies and the benefits it brings to the government and NGO partners and targets groups are well-regarded. The project was planned by organizations with development experience in Cambodia (primarily in the education area) and that background served them well—to design their efforts in alignment with and support of national efforts such as Education for All and international efforts such as the Millennium Development Goals. This prior work also allowed them to mobilize efficiently and establish themselves in the 12 target districts with alacrity.

The OPTIONS Project is a very complex undertaking, providing a myriad of educational supports to impoverished, mostly rural, communities. A scholarship program has been implemented in all three provinces in which the implementing partners work; other support and awareness strategies are customized to the individual communities. Capacity building has been a major initiative of the project, emphasizing training and responsibility at the local level. Advocacy and efforts to influence policymaking have taken place most successfully at the local and provincial level as well. More recently, the project has joining with other organizations to have more impact on national conversations regarding education policies and child labor and exploitation issues.

A strong partnership was established between WE, KAPE, and CARE to strengthen access and quality in education in disadvantaged provinces. The management structure of the OPTIONS Project promotes communication and collaboration to refine strategies and facilitate cross-fertilization. The partnership with The Asia Foundation focusing on effective advocacy has been less successful. The project partners have involved government ministries (particularly Education and Social Affairs) from the outset, and because of this association some of programs and practices of the EI project are likely to be sustained.

The OPTIONS Project benefits from experienced and dedicated staff and leadership. They have become active in the national dialogue among international organizations and NGOs to address the most pressing problems related to education, trafficking, and child exploitation. Staff turnover among the founding senior staff seems to have had an impact in that positions have been vacant for a period of time and those who remain report that demands have increased on them. Oversight and implementation in Banteay Meanchay province appears to have been less effective—probably to some extent due to the distance from headquarters management in Phnom Penh. Data collection and analysis for both program improvement and reporting have been a challenge for the project and may not have been used as fully and effectively as desired.

The OPTIONS Project has given attention to sustainability questions. Its involvement with government agencies and focus on capacity building will help some of the educational efforts in curriculum, pedagogy, and management continue. Unfortunately, it is not clear that funding for the Scholarship Program, which appears to be a critical component in enrollment and retention success, will be able to continue without the funds that the EI program has provided.

## **3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite all its positive results, the project has gaps and challenges that need to be addressed. The following recommendations are thus suggested to further improve implementation and buttress the impact and sustainability of the project:

### **3.2.1 Implementation Strategies**

The project mainly focuses on providing education and training services to children and girls who are at risk of trafficking and exploitation. While there are some project initiatives to provide support and education services to children who were victims of trafficking and exploitation, especially girls, these are less significant compared with the project's accomplishments in providing access to education to girls who are considered at-risk of trafficking and exploitation. More attention and efforts may be needed to address the education needs of rescued and reintegrated children to fully address the Cambodian needs and the goals of the EI program.

The initiative of providing education to working children in the brick factory sector in Prey Veng (described in 2.2.9) is a worthwhile pilot activity and is very much encouraged, as working children in Cambodia have no access to education and vocational training network. This would be a pioneer project on education for hard-to-reach working children in Cambodia. OPTIONS should further explore the experience of other countries in the region for models, as there is little documented experience within Cambodia in addressing these populations. Careful programming should be made to ensure the support of employers and parents for the education program of the children; to develop teaching-learning methodologies including materials and curriculum that allow for the possible disadvantages in the learning abilities of the children who have been exposed to physically demanding and hazardous work; and to take into account the financial implications for the family in removing a contributor to the family's meager income.

To improve the future opportunities of the participants who have graduated from the life skills and livelihood training program, OPTIONS should consider linking the graduates to the other NGOs with savings and micro-credit programs operating in the project areas. This will help ensure and sustain the benefits that the girls receive from the training.

Implementation (and consequently outcomes) in Banteay Meanchay province has not been as successful as in the other two provinces. Although it is an exceedingly difficult environment in which to work with at-risk and exploited children, it is precisely for that reason that more attention and resources be given to finding activities and implementation strategies that work (especially given limited local capacity). Effective models developed here would be extremely valuable in other difficult settings and contribute to "best practices" that the field seeks.

There may be a need to re-examine and improve the newly introduced peer support in monitoring school performance and attendance of scholarship recipients. In Kampong Cham, the scholars have expressed difficulties monitoring and following up on absentees in their group, as they need to allocate time and financial resources to undertake this work. The scholars also need methods and skills to address the problem effectively.

The project should keep its standards in ensuring not only the quality of teaching-learning, but oversight of the quality and performance of school management as well. For example, collection of unofficial fees in school should be strongly discouraged.

A “best practices” publication from OPTIONS’ experiences has been in the works for some time. The project’s work using different strategies for different locales and their fine-tuning of interventions is admired by outside observers who anticipate considerable value in such a document. It is critical that such information be disseminated timely (in the near future) so as to be of use to others.

### **3.2.2 Strengthening Partnerships**

The plan to cooperate with the ILO-TBP strategy of mobilizing civil society and creating a network to promote advocacy and policies against child labor should be actively encouraged. Experiences in other countries have shown that child labor issues can only be effectively addressed when there is a collective advocacy and action to eliminate it. This targeted collective effort of advocacy and influencing policymaking at the national level is a good complement the successful efforts that OPTIONS has had with various ministries at the provincial and more local levels.

A more concerted effort should be made to define or redefine project roles and timelines with The Asia Foundation so that this partnership will yield the impact anticipated in the original project planning.

UNICEF and OPTIONS should continue to consult and determine the level of financial incentives provided to government partners, as this will have an implication on the degree of government support and cooperation to their respective projects. Competing donor programs are not in the interest of development in Cambodia.

OPTIONS should seek the cooperation and active involvement of UNICEF’s Education Section in the policy dialogue on education, especially at the national level. UNICEF has a mandate to provide technical guidance and capacity building in national education programs and policies. It can strengthen the policy advocacy initiatives of the project, and can help ensure the action and sustainability of proposed policies. Discussions with representatives of the UNICEF’s Education Section revealed keen interest to collaborate on the activities of the education policy advocacy project.

### **3.2.3 Measuring Impact**

The project notes that it is difficult to track and demonstrate with data the effectiveness of education as prevention of child labor, trafficking, and exploitation. Integral to the OPTIONS Project and the EI Program itself is the philosophy and belief that education (particularly high quality, relevant education) is a powerful force—providing alternatives to exploitive work through literacy and increasing awareness, self-efficacy, and problem-solving and decision-making skills. At the same time, program improvements and accountability to funders are linked to data to demonstrate results (or lack thereof). It is recommended that OPTIONS launch some

new efforts to acquire and use data. Given existing workloads, the project may want to retain an advisor to assist in this effort. Specific suggestions for a more rigorous effort at obtaining data for documentation and understanding include the following:

- Carefully review the survey data from the University of Phnom Penh for implications by the project strategies and future surveys (design and collection). (Unfortunately, much of the benefit of this survey is lost by innumerable delays.)
- Communicate with other organizations in Cambodia about availability of studies and data that could assist this project. Perhaps jointly initiate a few targeted investigations of topics of mutual interest.
- Using knowledge about the project's communities and where this could best be carried out, undertake a small pilot study to follow up with dropouts and completers, so that the project has some indication of post-education outcomes.

It is noted (from the most recent technical report) that the targets on government policies for Output 4 have been revised. This is endorsed given the expected differential success of the project on influencing policies at the different levels of providing education services for disadvantaged groups. OPTIONS' revisions to their output indicators demonstrate thoughtful monitoring of project activities and results and flexibility on the part of the project and USDOL.

The inability of the Student Tracking System to serve project needs is an ongoing frustration; a drain on resources; a deterrent to use of data for quick, formative purposes; and a bad model for partners who should be encouraged to carry out data-based decisions. A concerted effort should be made to have in place a user-friendly database that works for the OPTIONS Project—either through local or USDOL technical assistance.

### **3.2.4 Ensuring Effectiveness and Sustainability**

OPTIONS is a very complex and labor-intensive project. This fact may interfere with possibility of others being able to continue implementation and direction of activities when the USDOL grant ends. Project management staff should conduct a “retreat” and reflect on accomplishments and unresolved issues and plan for the transition—what and who and how others will continue what this project has begun.

At this point of the project, OPTIONS should strategically consider what measures are required to guarantee the sustainability of the essential activities of the project, especially in its aim to integrate project activities to the government education and social services framework.

Capacity building continues to warrant attention. The project should to assess and address the capacity development needs of the government partners, especially at the local levels, in order to ensure that they can continue to develop activities launched by OPTIONS—even after the end of the funding support from USDOL.



OPTIONS management may need to review the increasing workload of the staff as the project continues to expand, and undertake new activities. It may also need to outline different project activities, required staff and project resources based on the desired outputs, as stated in the project logframe. Activities should be realistically matched with resources.

The government's delays in providing textbooks to schoolchildren are a serious concern that may have important implications on the project's effectiveness. There may be a need for OPTIONS, together with the other education networks in the country, to strongly urge the government to take serious steps to address this problem and others of a similar nature. Lack of action and response from the government will not only hamper the effectiveness of OPTIONS but of other education initiatives in the country as well.